

West Fork SST Installation

Proposed Action

San Gabriel River Ranger District, Angeles National Forest

Los Angeles County, California

May 2013

Background

San Gabriel Canyon is part of the San Gabriel River Ranger District of the Angeles National Forest. The Canyon serves as a year-round day-use recreation landscape. Its major river system, the San Gabriel Watershed, flows through the Los Angeles Basin, connecting the San Gabriel Mountains to the Pacific Ocean providing residents of the Los Angeles Basin a link to a natural environment.

The West Fork of the San Gabriel River represents a unique and valuable resource adjacent to the largest metropolitan area in California. It provides for numerous recreational activities to the general public including bicycling, hiking, camping, fishing, picnicking, water play and wildlife viewing. All these activities are generally confined to the main channel of the West Fork, near SR39, and its associated riparian vegetation areas. Due to its recreational values, both the upper and lower segments of the fork are considered to be outstandingly remarkable and attractive to both local and regional recreationists making the fork eligible for Wild and Scenic river designation. Additionally, along the fork you find three National Recreation Trails, year-round flowing water, high quality fishing opportunities, a campground, and access to the San Gabriel Wilderness.

A rich diversity of plant and animal species are found in the West Fork. Designated a Critical Biological Land Use Zone, it's one of the most important areas on the national forest to manage for the protection of species-at-risk. The riparian vegetation consists of dense stands of sycamore, white alder, and willow, including one of the largest contiguous stands of bigcone Douglas-fir and canyon oaks, in the Angeles National Forest. Found in the West Fork, and of significant importance, is the federally threatened Santa Ana sucker and its occupied designated critical habitat. The West Fork also supports a large population of western pond turtles which are on the Forest Service sensitive species list, and other numerous imperiled species including the Santa Ana speckled dace and the arroyo chub. The assemblage of native fishes along with the State of California Wild trout stream designation give the West Fork of the San Gabriel River a regional and national significance for fish resources.

Purpose and Need for Action

The West Fork area is designated as a High Impact Recreation Area (HIRA), which is defined as an area that supports or sustains concentrated recreation use. Concentrated public use exists, mostly in the form of family-based activities. A road parallels the fork, providing easy access to the water for recreationists. Many forest visitors enjoy the area, and that enjoyment has led to chronic overuse. Recreation uses are conflicting with other resource values and the infrastructure

supporting the fork is aging. The focus of recreation along the riparian area is reaching or exceeds its capacity.

The lack of restroom facilities in the immediate vicinity poses a real threat to riparian dependent species and their habitat. Thousands of gallons of human waste and trash are removed from this location every year, resulting in a serious environmental impact on the river and its surrounding habitat, including several miles downstream. While some facilities exist north of the fork, the current state of the river is quite dire with an unacceptable ratio of toilets to visitors. The degradation of the river and its productivity continues to increase year after year, impacting the overall health of the West Fork's ecosystem.

The purpose of this project is to improve federally listed species habitat and to reduce the overall environmental impacts associated with the absence of a restroom located within the immediate vicinity. The SST will help significantly reduce the amount of human waste going into the riparian ecosystem, improving the condition of the San Gabriel watershed and federally listed species habitat. In addition to helping ameliorate the natural resources in the area, the SST will better accommodate the large and diverse user population providing for a safer and improved visitor experience.

Proposed Action

The San Gabriel River Ranger District proposes to install a Sweet Smelling Toilet (SST) in the lower portion of the West Fork of the San Gabriel River (see attached map). The concrete vault toilet will have a watertight underground tank, which contains all wastewater which enters the vault. All waste will be monitored, pumped and disposed of in a manner consistent with FS policy and all applicable health and environmental regulations. Construction of the double toilet building will be done off-site.

This project is consistent with the objectives and management direction of the Angeles National Forest Land Management Plan where it identifies the need to provide for public use and natural resource protection (Part 2, Goal 3.1), improve riparian conditions (Part 2, Goal 5.2), and provide ecological conditions to sustain viable populations of native and desired nonnative species (Part 2, Goal 6.2). The Land Management Plan also recognizes the need to offer a wide range of high quality, environmentally sustainable developed recreation opportunities to a rapidly growing and culturally diverse visitor population, with minimal visitor conflicts and effects to other resources (LMP, Strategy REC 3). This strategy encourages the development of new, environmentally sustainable recreation opportunities, areas and infrastructure to relieve concentrated demands within existing high-use areas and to accommodate future growth and new uses elsewhere. This strategy is linked to the National Strategic Plan, Goal 3 and objective 1; to provide outdoor recreation opportunities.

This proposed action supports the resource land management program emphasis.